Review: SimCity 2000

by Peace Gardiner & Kevin Savetz

IMG Rating: 1 1 1 1 1

Type	City Simulator
Publisher	Maxis (510/254-9700)
Retail Price	69.96
Street Price	45.00
Requires	Mac '020 or above, 4MB Ram, hard disk, 256 colors
Protection	None

Archival reconstruction from the original Inside Mac Games electronic magazine. Text, styling cues, and artwork were extracted from the original Macintosh resources; the flowing PDF layout is new. Source: January 1994 back issue preserved on the January/February 1995 CD-ROM.

How Many Peruvian Llamas Does Your Zoo Have? SimCity's sequel is sublime. After months of teasing, Maxis has released SimCity 2000, the long-awaited follow-up to SimCity. The original SimCity (now named SimCity Classic) was a fine program, and the first of its kind — focusing on simulating a real-world environment. Since SimCity, Maxis has created a variety of other simulation programs — SimLife, SimAnt, SimEarth, and even SimPower Plant for training real-life energy folks. Maxis has learned what makes a good simulation and an engaging game. It is no surprise that SimCity 2000 is their finest creation.

Those who played the original version of SimCity know the basics: you're a city planner and its your job to build and sustain a city. Your city is populated by "Sims," finicky citizens who demand the very best from you, their elected official.

Simply a New Game. Maxis made the sequel feel incredibly real, especially in comparison to the original SimCity. In SimCity Classic, you could zone commercial, industrial, and residential property, plus a collection of other sites like police forces, fire departments, and stadiums. With SimCity 2000, you can zone "dense" or "light" residential, commercial, and industrial areas — plus you can build seaports, airports, marinas, zoos, stadiums (you choose the sport,) schools, colleges, libraries, museums, hospitals, bus stations, and other structures. You're no longer limited to fixed-size zones — you can create zones, airports, and seaports of any size (limited, of course, by your budget.)

How do you keep the Sims happy? Keep taxes low and crime down, create jobs and educate the citizens. The game offers copious information about how you fare as a city official. You can "query" any piece of property for information — you'll receive pertinent (and sometimes not-so-pertinent) data about the locale. Query a college or school and you are shown its rating, and number of students and teachers. In residential zones you are told crime and pollution levels. Point to a statue and find out how many pigeons are perched there.

After your population reaches 120,000, you are rewarded with cool-looking Arcologies.

Original artwork embedded with this review.

SimStats. Players of SimCity Classic will find there are better ways to get information in the new game. The “map” screen, a hotbed of information about your city, is still available in 2000, but rendered all but unnecessary by the enhanced query function. Also, instead of a simple voter opinion window, you must read the local newspapers to learn what the Sims think of you. (The number of newspapers available depends on the size of your city.) In addition to very funny articles, each paper has a different sort of mayor approval section — with a percentage approval rating, or lists of the issues that bother Sims most. Maxis still supplies the information you need to run a city, but in a much more amusing format.

SimDetails. Attention to detail helps to make SimCity 2000 such a great game. 2000 has a huge set of financial options. Tax rates are variable by zone and industry. You can also decide on amenities for your city: you may provide homeless shelters or city beautification plans, or make your town a nuclear free zone. When your population reaches a certain level, the military will ask to build a base in your city. A military base could create jobs or send citizens fleeing from their homes.

The availability of power plants changes depending on the year — you can’t build nuclear plants in 1900. Your power choices include coal, solar, wind, microwave, and fusion. Each type of power has its own characteristics, lifespan, and of course, price. Power plants don’t last forever so keep enough money to replace them when they die. Try an all solar powered city, then watch the solar collectors explode after 50 years. Ouch!

If you didn’t save enough money, sell some bonds. Of course, you will have to pay the bonds back — with interest. Fortunately, annual budget time comes around so you can see a projection of income for the following year.

SimRoom with a View. You can view your city at different angles and distances, or even underground. You’ll need to use all of the angles, too, because SimCity, like Maxis’ A-Train before it, uses richly textured 3-D terrain and buildings. The underside of your simulated city is important because you are responsible for maintaining your water system. You can build pipes, desalinization plants, storage towers, treatment facilities, and water pumps. With the added dimension to your city you have to build pipes up and through hills and mountains, as well as over the rivers and through the woods.

Underground is also home to subways, one of several forms of public transit. Your Sims are no longer relegated to one form of public transportation. In addition to roads and rail (which require railroad stations) there are highways, subways, and buses.

SimCity 2000 is filled with little touches throughout making it personal and fun. For instance, you can name most buildings. (I once had a city with police stations named after Daryl Gates, Rodney King, and Reginald Denney. This may not be useful, but it certainly adds flavor to a town.)

A monster from space wrecks havoc on the citizens of Cupertino. Run, Sculley, run!

Original artwork embedded with this review.

SimCity 2000 is truly full of surprises — something unexpected crops up every time. If your citizens like your work, they may throw a parade in your honor; if they don't, they may riot. Low populations mean abandoned buildings. Heavily populated futuristic cities can have "arcologies" — huge domed cities-within-a-building.

You can start by building your city on bare land, or begin with one of several scenarios (such as Oakland, Charleston, and Hollywood) in which you must overcome a problem or disaster (such as fires, flooding, or a space-alien attack.) The prefab scenarios are so enjoyable that you may never want to create a city from scratch.

SimNitPicks. SimCity 2000 is almost perfect. Unfortunately, the game only runs on 256 colors or shades of grey. The simulation runs rather quickly, even on huge cities, but scrolling around the city, zooming, and rotating the view can be slow. SimCity 2000 also crashed inexplicably until we booted without our usual cadre of system extensions.

The music leaves something to be desired —it's uninteresting and quickly becomes repetitive. (Admittedly, Maxis never touted this as SimPhony.) Finally, it's much too easy to accidentally save your game-in-progress with the same name as some of SimCity's sample cities, obliterating the example game until it's reloaded from floppy disk.

SimCity 2000 is definitely Maxis most inspired work to date. Loyal SimCity Classic enthusiasts will adore 2000's new features, tools, and wit. Those new to city management, as well as Classic gurus, will find hours of pleasure in one of finest Macintosh games ever.

Pros

- Excellent 3-D graphics
- Includes realistic elements of city planning
- Very well executed second edition

Cons

- Only works in 256-color mode
- Repetitive music
- Crashes with used with some extensions